

TITLE OF INVENTION

Low Voltag D or Switch

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] Not Applicable

5 STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR
DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not Applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of Invention

10 [0003] This invention pertains to an apparatus for low voltage control in a residential home. More particularly, this invention pertains to low voltage system with an isolation unit that is easy to install and meets voltage separation requirements.

2. Description of the Related Art

15 [0004] Home automation or management systems which permit increased control of at least some of the electrical subsystems in a dwelling have begun to replace or to supplement conventional wiring systems that operate at a high voltage (typically 120 volts in a residence). These automation systems use low voltage (typically less than 30 volts) circuits controlled by low voltage switches to
20 control high voltage loads. Many home control systems and lighting control systems or subsystems are generally incompatible with conventional wiring techniques. One common complaint is that the additional wiring required for such systems results in a maze of additional wiring. The systems also tend to be relatively expensive. It is desirable, therefore, to have a wiring device that is
25 compatible with existing wiring and requires only the addition of easy to install low voltage wiring during initial construction.

- [0005] In accordance with the National Electric Code (NEC), electrical conductors including electric light, power, class 1, or non power-limited fire protection signaling conductors must be separated from electrical conductors including power-limited class 2 or class 3 conductors. The conductors of the one group cannot be in any cable, cable tray, compartment, enclosure, outlet box, raceway, or similar fitting with conductors from the other group unless the conductors are separated by a barrier. Another exception is where conductors of one group are introduced solely to connect to equipment connected to conductors of the other group.
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- [0006] The NEC further requires that all joints, connections, and splices of electrical cables be made inside an approved enclosure and further must include tight connections with the conduit or cable. Conventional electrical boxes may be made from metal or plastic. The box is further designed with great flexibility so that wires can be brought in from any side by removing a "knock out" to receive a lug for mounting fixtures or the like.
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- [0007] United States Patent Numbers 3,371,149; 3,472,945; 5,445,539; and 6,483,031 are representative of patents disclosing various devices that separate different classes of conductors. United States Patent Number 3,371,149 discloses a metal barrier **26** in a wiring box **11** separating power **22** and television antenna **22a** conductors. United States Patent Number 3,472,945 discloses an outlet box **10** divided with a metal barrier plate or partition **15**.
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- [0008] United States Patent Number 5,445,539 discloses a wiring device **20** to which different classes of conductors are attached. The wiring device **20** is mounted in a conventional electrical box **84** and separation of the conductors is achieved by routing the low voltage conductors **76** through a tubular projection **32**, which extends through a knockout opening **86** in the box **84**. The tubular projection **32** is attached to the housing **22** of the wiring device **20**, thereby separating the low voltage conductors **76** from the power conductors **48, 80** in the electrical box **84**.
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[0009] United States Patent Number 6,483,031 discloses an enclosure, or control module, **18** attached to an outlet box **58**. The low voltage wiring **48** enters the enclosure **18** at the rear, directly from the wall space, and the power wiring **49** enters the outlet box **58**, where it is routed to the other end of the enclosure **18**, which connects the enclosure **18** to the outlet box **58**.

[0010] Several problems are typically encountered in the use of low voltage control in a residential home. For example, the low voltage switches are typically push-button switches mounted in the door jamb adjacent a door hinge. Such an installation requires a mortise cut to install the switch, which is a time consuming operation. Also, many low voltage controllers require the use of custom components, such as electrical boxes and cover plates, instead of using standard, readily available components. Further, many low voltage controller installations require that the low voltage wiring be routed in a specific manner, thereby limiting the flexibility of the installer.

15 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] According to one embodiment of the present invention, a low voltage control system for a residential home is provided. The system includes a controller that isolates the high voltage wiring from the low voltage wiring, a switch in the low voltage circuit, and an operated device in the high voltage circuit. In one embodiment, the controller fits into a standard box.

[0012] In one embodiment, the controller has a flat front panel with exposed terminals for the low voltage circuit. In another embodiment, the controller has a front panel with a recessed area in which the low voltage terminals are located. In still another embodiment, the controller has a low voltage terminal block with a low profile, in which the terminal block protrudes from an opening in the front panel.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] The above-mentioned features of the invention will become more clearly understood from the following detailed description of the invention read together with the drawings in which:

5 Figure 1 is a perspective view of one embodiment of the system showing a closet door operating a switch and a lamp;

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of one embodiment of the system;

Figure 3 is a perspective view of one embodiment of the controller mounted in a box attached to a stud;

10 Figure 4 is a perspective view of one embodiment of the controller;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a low voltage switch;

Figure 6 is an exploded view of another embodiment of the controller; and

Figure 7 is an exploded view of another embodiment of the controller.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

15 [0014] An apparatus for low voltage control in a residential environment is disclosed. The apparatus allows the installation of low voltage wiring for controlling lighting and other loads in a residence.

[0015] Figure 1 illustrates one embodiment of the control system **10** in which a closet door **114** operates a switch **104**. When the door **114** is closed, that 20 is, the door **114** is seated in the frame **112**, the switch **104** is actuated and the closet lamp **102** is not illuminated. When the door **114** is open, the switch **104** returns to a normal position and the lamp **102** is illuminated.

[0016] Figure 2 illustrates a simplified schematic of one embodiment of the control system **10**. A low voltage controller **202** is powered by a power, or high 25 voltage, source **204**, such as 120 volts alternating current. The controller **202**

monitors a switch **104** and operates a driven device **102**, such as a fluorescent lamp. The circuit of which the switch **104** is a part operates at a low voltage, for example, 6 to 18 volts. The driven device **102** is driven by the power, or high voltage, source **204**. The controller **202** isolates the power voltage circuit, which includes the source **204** and the lamp **102**, from the low voltage circuit connected to the switch **102**.

[0017] Figure 3 illustrates a standard wall wiring box **304** attached to a wall stud **302**. In the illustrated embodiment, the box **304** is a double wide box, which is sized to accommodate two standard appliances, for example, two wall switches or two duplex receptacles. These boxes **304** are known in the art and are commonly available in either plastic or sheet metal. In the illustrated embodiment, the controller **202** is mounted in the electrical box **304**. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the controller **202** can be adapted to be used with any standard type electrical box without departing from the spirit or scope of the present invention. The various types of boxes include those that are adapted to receive electrical equipment and have provisions for mounting such equipment inside the box. One example of such a box is an overhead box for mounting or receiving a lighting fixture.

[0018] Figure 4 illustrates the embodiment of the controller **202** shown in Figure 3. Inside the box **304** is one embodiment of a controller **202**. The low voltage wiring **314** is connected to a pair of standard screw terminals **312** in a recessed area **404** on the face plate **402** of the controller **202**. The power, or high voltage, wiring **408** exits through a grommet **412** in the enclosure, or controller module, **406**, which contains the functional components of the controller **202**. In another embodiment, the high voltage wiring **408** exits through an opening in the rear of the controller **202**. Because the high voltage wiring **408** is behind the face plate **402** of the controller **202** and isolated from the low voltage wiring **314**, which is routed through the opening between the box **304** and the wall-board, the controller **202** effectively isolates the power wiring **408** from the low voltage wiring **314**. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the number of power conductors **408** varies depending upon the application and type of controller.

[0019] The face plate **402** of the controller **202** is positioned such that the face plate **402** is adjacent to and substantially parallel to the major opening of the electrical box **304**. In this manner, the low voltage wiring **314** is routed over the face plate **402** and directly out of the box **304**, and the high voltage wiring **408** is 5 routed through the box **304** and out a cut-out in the box **304**.

[0020] In one embodiment, the box **304** with the controller **202** is mounted inside a closet with a blank cover over the opening to the box **304**. The low voltage wiring **314** is routed through the walls to the switch **104**. Because the low voltage wiring **314** is Class 2 wiring, the wiring **314** can be twisted pair conductors routed 10 without conduit. The low voltage wiring is routed from the terminals **404**, over the face plate **402**, and between the electrical box **304** and the wall board (not illustrated) to the switch **104**.

[0021] Figure 5 illustrates one embodiment of a low voltage switch **104**. The switch **104** is a ball switch, that is, the switch operator is a ball **504** that protrudes 15 beyond a mounting plate **502**. When the ball **504** is pushed into the body of the switch **104**, the switch **104** changes state. Such a switch **104** is suitable for mounting in a location other than the door jamb adjacent the door hinges. That is, such a switch **104** is suitable for being actuated by a door moving laterally across a surface on which the switch **104** is mounted.

[0022] In one embodiment, the switch **104** is mounted in the upper portion 20 of a door frame **112** such that when the door **114** is closed, the ball **504** is operated, thereby actuating the switch **104** and causing the controller **202** to block power to the driven device **102**. In another embodiment, the switch **104** is mounted at another location on the door frame. When the door **114** opens and 25 releases the ball **504** to its normal position, the switch **104** causes the controller **202** to provide power to the driven device **102**. The switch **104** fits into the gap between the door **114** and the door frame **112** without requiring extensive work to fit the switch **104** without interfering with the door **114** closing. An advantage to locating the ball switch **104** away from the jamb adjacent the door hinges is that 30 the switch **104** can be installed without a mortise cut.

[0023] Figure 6 illustrates another embodiment of a controller **202'** having a face plate **602**. The face plate **602** has two mounting portions **632** and a recessed portion **634**. The mounting portions **632** are located at opposite ends of the recessed portion **634** and include openings **622** for securing the face plate **602** to the box **304** and a second set of openings **624** for securing a cover plate over the opening of the box **304**, thereby protecting the controller **202'** and providing a 5 cosmetically pleasing appearance.

[0024] The illustrated embodiment shows a circuit board **606**, which contains the sensing and switching components for the controller **202**. In another 10 embodiment, an enclosure replaces the illustrated circuit board **606**. The circuit board **606** has a terminal block **604** that protrudes above the surface the circuit board **606** and fits into an opening **614** in the recessed portion **634** of the face plate **602**. The terminal block **604** protrudes past the surface of the recessed portion **634** sufficiently for the low voltage wiring **314** to connect to the terminal block **604**, and the recessed portion **634** is offset from the plane of the mounting portions **632** sufficiently for the low voltage wiring **314** to be routed out of the box **304** and isolated from the high voltage wiring **408** without interfering with a cover 15 plate. The power wiring **408** connects to the circuit board **606** at a side other than the side with the terminal block **604**, thereby maintaining separation from the low 20 voltage wiring **314**.

[0025] Figure 7 illustrates still embodiment of a controller **202"** having a face plate **702** and an opening **714** for receiving a terminal block **704**. The face plate **702** in this embodiment is flat and the circuit board **706** is adapted to connect to the face plate **702** with a terminal block **704** protruding through the opening **714** in the face plate **702**. In another embodiment, an enclosure replaces 25 the illustrated circuit board **706**. The terminal block **704**, in the illustrated embodiment, has means for securing the low voltage wiring **314** that are accessible from the front of the face plate **702** with the terminal block **704** having a low profile, less than 1/8 inch, above the face plate **704**. Such a terminal block **704** 30 maintains a low profile above the front surface of the face plate **702**, thereby

allowing the low voltage wiring **314** to be routed along the face plate **702** and outside the electrical box **304**.

[0026] In another embodiment, a controller module replaces the circuit board **606, 706**. The module contains the sensing and switching components for the controller **202', 202"**. The terminal block **604, 704** protrudes from the module and fits into the opening **614, 714** in the face place **602, 702**. In still another embodiment, the circuit board **606, 706** is contained in an enclosure, is potted, or otherwise is protected from casual contact with any energized components.

[0027] In one embodiment, the controller **202, 202', 202"** fits into a conventional electrical box **304** and accepts a conventional cover to hide the installation of the controller, thereby allowing use with conventional and readily available components. The location of the terminal block **312, 604, 704** is such that the low voltage wiring **314** can be easily routed in a manner that is convenient to install while still maintaining separation from the high voltage wiring **408**.

[0028] The low voltage control system **10** includes various functions. The function of securing a controller in an electrical box is implemented in various embodiments by the shape and configuration of the controller **202, 202', 202"** including the mounting holes **622** in the face plate **402, 602, 702**. The function of terminating a plurality of low voltage conductors **314** to the controller **202** is implemented, in one embodiment, by the screw terminals **312**, and in other embodiments, by the terminal blocks **604, 704**.

[0029] The function of isolating the plurality of low voltage conductors **314** from a plurality of power conductors **408** in the electrical box **304** is implemented, in one embodiment, by the screw terminals **312** located in a recess **404** with the power conductors **408** located on the opposite side of the face plate **402** from the screw terminals **312**. In another embodiment, the isolation is implemented by the terminal block **604** protruding through an opening, or aperture, **614** in a recessed portion **634** of the face plate **602** with the power conductors **408** located on the opposite side of the face plate **602** from the accessible portion of the terminal block **604**. In still another embodiment, the isolation is implemented by the low profile

terminal block **704** protruding through an opening, or aperture, **714** in the face plate **702** with the power conductors **408** located on the opposite side of the face plate **702** from the accessible portion of the terminal block **704**.

[0030] From the foregoing description, it will be recognized by those skilled
5 in the art that a low voltage control system has been provided.. A low voltage controller is adapted to fit into a standard wiring box, and the controller provides isolation/separation of the low voltage wiring from other wiring. In one embodiment, the low voltage wiring is terminated at a recessed terminal block. In another embodiment, the face plate of the controller has a recessed area with a
10 terminal block protruding through an opening, thereby isolating the low voltage wiring from the other wiring. In still another embodiment, the face plate has an opening through which a low profile terminal block protrudes, thereby providing isolation.

[0031] While the present invention has been illustrated by description of
15 several embodiments and while the illustrative embodiments have been described in considerable detail, it is not the intention of the applicant to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional advantages and modifications will readily appear to those skilled in the art. The invention in its broader aspects is therefore not limited to the specific details, representative
20 apparatus and methods, and illustrative examples shown and described. Accordingly, departures may be made from such details without departing from the spirit or scope of applicant's general inventive concept.